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MARTIN WAGNER'S

Hepcats

NUMBER 10 MAY 1998

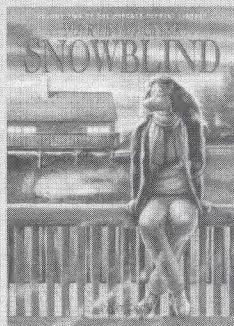


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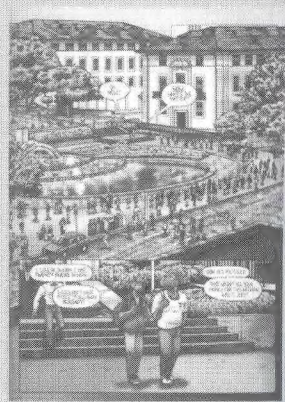
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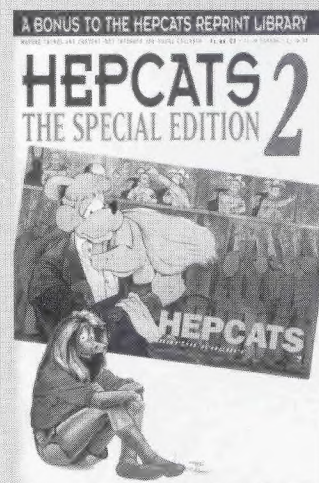
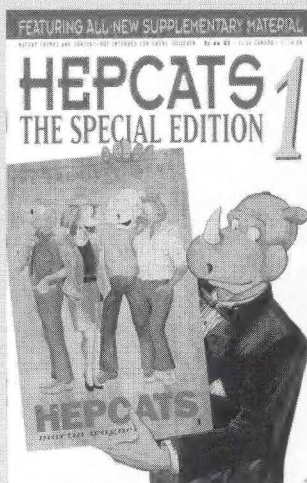
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Hepcats Snowblind

CREATED, WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY

MARTIN WAGNER

COVER PAINTING BY MORGAN

DETAIL FROM THE COVER OF THE SNOWBLIND PART ONE

GRAPHIC NOVEL

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY

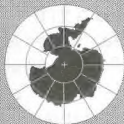
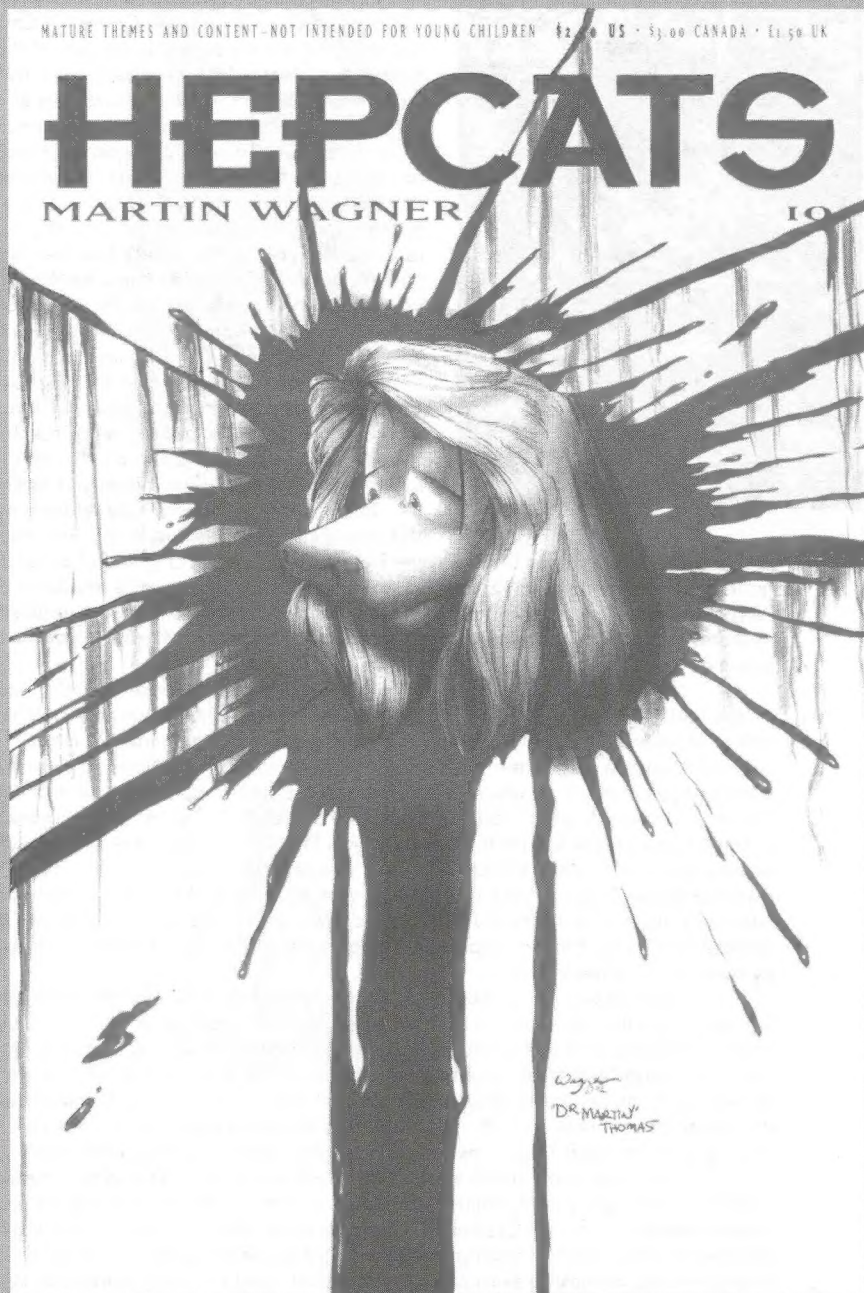
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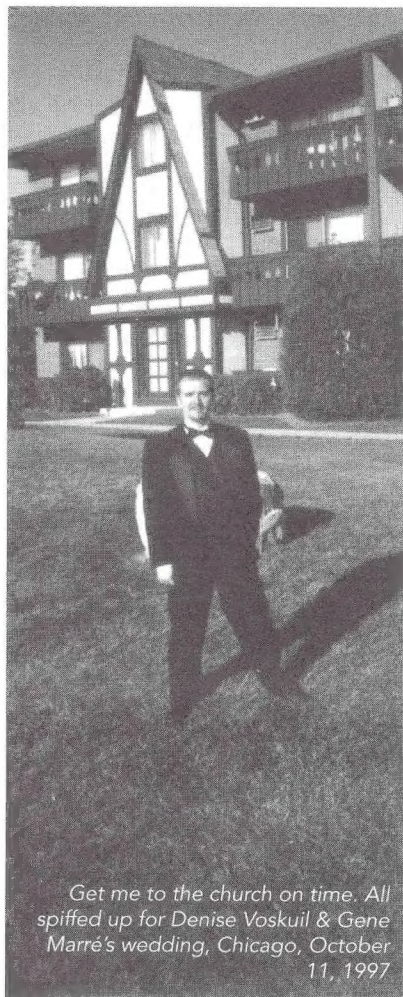
MAY 1998

Chapter 8

Exorcism (prelude)



ANTARCTIC PRESS
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



Get me to the church on time. All spiffed up for Denise Voskuil & Gene Marré's wedding, Chicago, October 11, 1997

HEPCATS 10

CREATOR'S COMMENTARY TO 1998 EDITION

(These introductions are provided by Martin Wagner as exclusives to the Antarctic Press reprints of *Hepcats*' first 12 issues. You might want to read the story beforehand, to avoid possible spoilers.)

(Last issue, I was going through the list of the various myths and misconceptions about the self-publishing "movement" of the early '90's. I continue my most enjoyable rant; as you recall, I was up to...)

Myth #4: Self-published comics got better treatment from retailers and distributors than other independently published comics. Okay...where was I...let's see, relating to retailers as small business owners...putting a face to the product...hm, hm. Okay. So. Yes, we did establish good rapport with retailers and distributors during those opportunities where we got to meet them. BUT...

For every strong, indy-supportive retailer (there were many, of course; Star Clipper in St. Louis, Chicago Comics in Chicago, Laughing Ogre in Columbus, too many others my sleepy brain cannot think of right now as I happen to be typing—so please don't bombard me with "what about me?" e-mails, okay?), the fact is that most of the folks who smiled at us, drank beer with us, and shook our hands at the distributors' retailer seminars, went right back home to their superhero stores to conduct superbusiness as superusual. For all that we seemed to be making headway, just getting out there and forcing people to notice us, there was no interrupting the Marvel, DC, and Image juggernauts. I recall being at the Capital City show in Madison, WI, back in 1992, and watching ashen-faced retailers filing out of the hotel's banquet room following the Marvel-sponsored dinner and three-hour slide show hawking their upcoming product. If you can imagine sitting on your ass for the length of *Titanic* watching slides featuring Marvel comics, listening to unctuous sales pitches all the while...brrrrrr. One retailer who spoke to me that night not only bemoaned the sheer shit he was forced to watch; "What's worse is, I have to order it," he told me, in the same tone of voice which he might have used to say, "I have to put my own daughter to work down at the truck stop as a prostitute!" In other words, even the retailers who liked us could only do so much with the books we were producing: the superhero religion had the industry in its firm, fundamentalist grip.

And yes, those indy-friendly retailers were the minority. Most couldn't give a shit about us no matter how many autographed jam posters we did. I had an LA

retailer tell me to my face he had never heard of my book and wouldn't order it even if he had. (His shop has since gone belly up.) Jeff Smith (*Jeff Smith!*) got a similar response from a retailer in his own home town! So no, I'm sorry. Anybody who says that we were the darlings of the industry, the valiant underdogs whom everybody loved, is misinformed; the few self-publishing success stories are the exception, not the rule. At best, we were...politely indulged.

And what about distributors? Well, I always had a good-if-problematic relationship with Diamond, not unlike, you might say, US-Chinese trade relations today. They knew my book had an audience, so they dealt with it with professional courtesy, but they weren't above stepping on me like a bug if they felt it was warranted. I also remember what a pain in the ass it was getting *The Collegiate Hepcats* onto the Star System, a re-order system Diamond has in place by which retailers can, presumably, restock longer-shelf-life items such as trade paperbacks with a single weekly phone call. I actually had to get Bill Schanes on the phone, and normally he's way too high up Diamond's corporate ladder to deal with trivia like that. Overall, though my orders from Diamond were always decent and we got along okay, I still always felt as if they regarded self-publishers as a minor nuisance. (I must say that I do consider Steve Geppi a really nice guy. Very personable and friendly for someone so goddamn rich he owns half of Baltimore; he'd wave to me from across a crowded hotel lobby. At least there was no "I'm too good to talk to you" arrogance coming from the top at Diamond; quite unlike Capital's Milton Griepp, who would never debase himself by speaking to a mere artist.)

Capital was my Good Buddy, particularly when jolly, elfin Wayne Markley ran my section of *Advance Comics*, Capital's catalogue. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the staff there were awesome, friendly folks, right down to the phone receptionist who made the mere act of calling Capital entertaining by the way she'd spit out "*GoodmorningCapitalCity*" in just under half a second whenever she picked up the phone. Capital was the distributor who took me up on my unusual offer of autographing comics at the warehouse sale that would take place during their retailers seminars; in 1991 I startled them by how many *Hepcats* I moved, and by the following year they were inviting other creators to join the fun. Moreso than Diamond, they were open to new ideas.

So imagine my shock when, ahem, let's say A Good Friend of Mine Who Is One of the Most Successful Self-Publishers Today (gee, Smiley, who could that be?) told me that, during Pro-Con in 1994, a Capital rep told a mutual friend of ours that Capital "really wants to nip this self-publishing thing in the bud." Whoa! Where did that sentiment come from? Changing times aside, why pick on us after what we'd done for them; huge autograph lines at their seminars, increasing sales of diverse product...and now they wanted to stamp us out. What the fuck? Well, now that Capital's dead, I guess we'll never get an answer to that mystery.

Oh, well. I gotta end this. Suffice to say: self-publishing was a nightmare, but it was rewarding. It got me broke, divorced, and in credit hell; it got me stature as a creator. It was a true double-edged sword that I will never regret pulling out of the stone. It taught me as much about myself as it did about the business. Myths aside, I'd do it again—if I had no other choice.

THIS IS WHERE EVERYTHING GETS WEIRD...



SURE, SURE, IT'S NOT LIKE
THINGS HAVEN'T GOTTEN A
LITTLE WEIRD ALREADY.

... IT'S JUST HARD TO DESCRIBE
HOW MY LIFE STARTED COMING
APART RIGHT AT THIS TIME.

FOR YEARS I HAD GIVEN
MYSELF A NEW LIFE, A NEW
IDENTITY, LIKE AN ACTRESS
TAKING ON A BIG ROLE. YOU
MIGHT SAY, I HAD BECOME
A NEW CHARACTER.

KATHRYN SPENCE SIMPLY
CEASED TO EXIST.

HELLO, ERICA DAVIS.

OF COURSE YOU KNOW,
KATHRYN DIDN'T REALLY
CEASE TO EXIST AT ALL.
I JUST TOLD MYSELF SHE
HAD. NO MATTER HOW MANY
PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIELDS
YOU BUILD UP, ALL THE
BAD MEMORIES AND OTHER
NASTIES NEVER REALLY
GO AWAY...

...THEY JUST HIDE.



LIKE I READ SOMEWHERE
ONCE THAT IN YOUR BRAIN IS
STORED THE MEMORY OF EACH
AND EVERY SINGLE DAY OF YOUR
LIFE...

EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE
OR SAID... EVERYWHERE YOU'VE
BEEN... EVERYONE YOU'VE
EVER KNOWN AND LOVED...

IT'S ALL THERE...

IT'S JUST SO MUCH
INFORMATION YOU CAN NEVER
ACCESS IT ALL....

THAT MEANS YOUR BRAIN IS
SORT OF AN ONGOING VIDEOTAPE
OF YOUR LIFE. BUT YOU'LL
NEVER BE ABLE TO PLAY ALL
OF IT BACK—ONLY SECONDS
AT A TIME AT BEST—TINY
CLIPS.

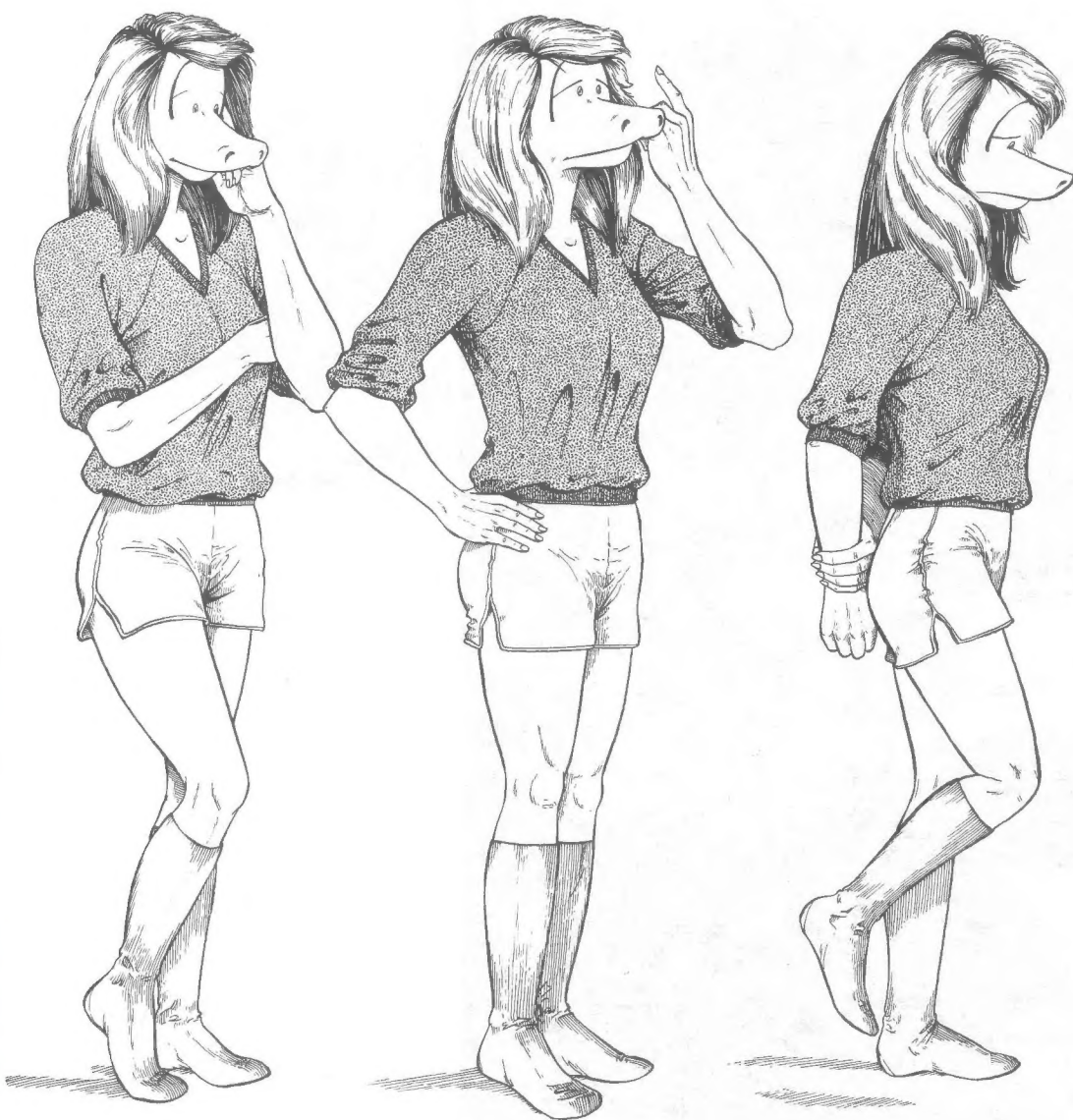
AND WHEN YOU DIE, THE TAPE
IS ERASED.

ALL THE IMAGES THAT YOU'VE
STORED AWAY, ALL THOSE MEMORIES...

...SIMPLY VANISH...

...LIKE THEY NEVER EXISTED.

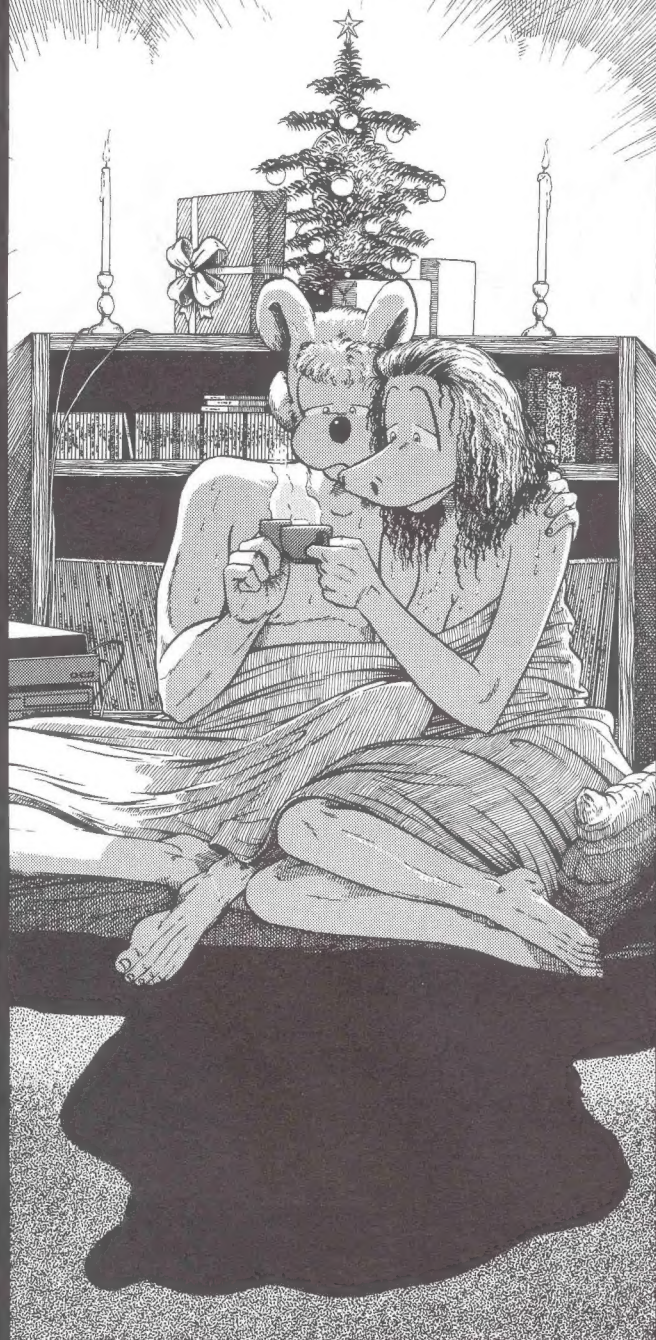
THAT'S SAD.





CHRISTMAS WAS BEAUTIFUL—
I MADE SURE OF THAT.

AFTER KEVIN DROPPED ME BACK
HOME (ARNIE WAS STILL GONE—I
DIDN'T FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT HE AND
GUNTHER HAD DONE UNTIL THE NEXT
DAY—ARNIE'S SO CUTE, SOMETIMES),
I LAY AWAKE FOR HOURS DOING A
LOT OF THINKING. AND I CAME TO A
DECISION.



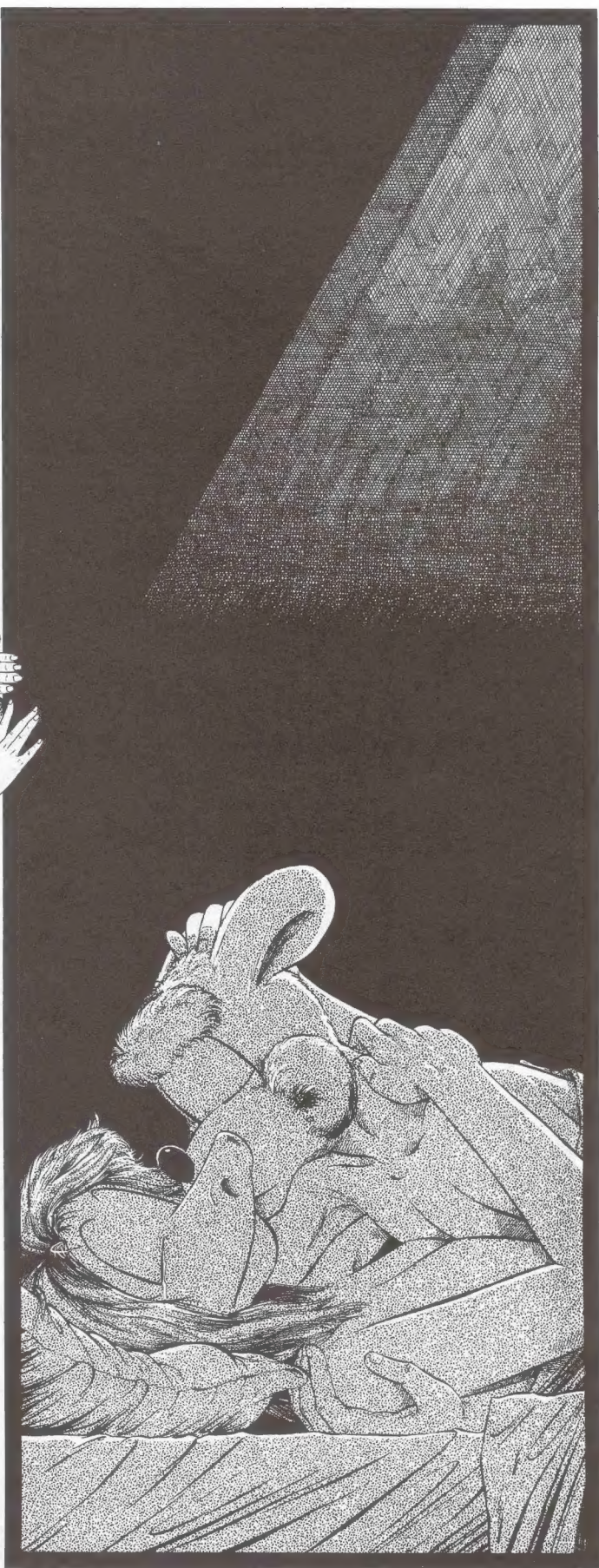
...THE NEXT DAY KEVIN AND I FINISHED
OUR CONVERSATION OVER THE PHONE, AND
KEVIN BEGAN HIS LONG DRIVE BACK TO
FLORIDA.

MY DECISION WAS TOTALLY FIRM.

CHRISTMAS WOULD BE JUST
AS ARNIE AND I HAD PLANNED IT.
I HAD A FEELING THAT EVERYTHING
WOULD GO MUCH MORE SMOOTHLY IF
I KEPT TO MY PERVERT-CUSTOMER
STORY, AND CONVINCED ARNIE THE
GUY HAD JUST GIVEN UP.

SO BY THE TIME CHRISTMAS EVE ROLLED
AROUND, THE DAY AT THE MALL WAS JUST
A MEMORY, AND QUOTE UNQUOTE ERICA
WAS BACK TO HER QUOTE UNQUOTE OLD
SELF.

YEAH...IT WAS A NICE CHRISTMAS!



I WAS **NOT**
EXPECTING THE RING.

I CRIED WHEN HE
GAVE IT TO ME.



I DON'T THINK HE KNEW WHY.

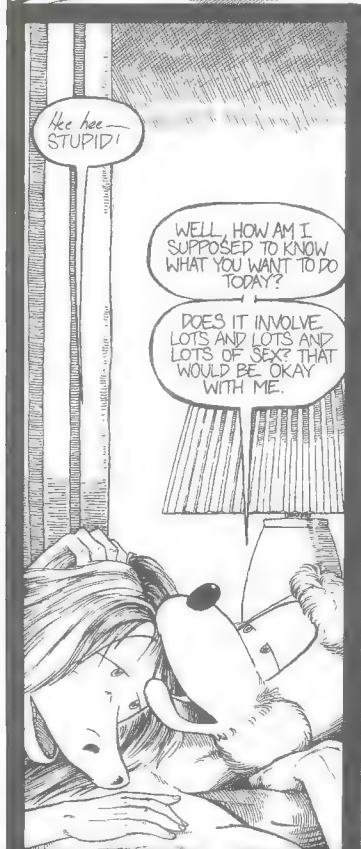




YOU KNOW WHAT
I'D LIKE TO DO TODAY?

UHHH—

GO SKYDIVING
IN THE NUDE.



Hee hee—
STUPID!

WELL, HOW AM I
SUPPOSED TO KNOW
WHAT YOU WANT TO DO
TODAY?

DOES IT INVOLVE
LOTS AND LOTS AND
LOTS OF SEX? THAT
WOULD BE OKAY
WITH ME.



sigh
ARNIE, ARNIE

I THOUGHT AFTER
LUNCH WE'D DRIVE
DOWN TO JOEY'S PAR-
ENTS' LAKEHOUSE...

I JUST WANT TO SAY
HI, DROP OFF A HAPPY
HANNUKAH CARD TO MRS.
MELYON...

HUH?!

WELL, WHAT
ABOUT OUR QUIET,
PERSONAL LITTLE
CHRISTMAS?



WELL...

...WE CAN JUST
CONTINUE IT...

...LATER.

**YOW
COLD
HAND!**



WELL, YOU
KNOW WHAT
THEY SAY.

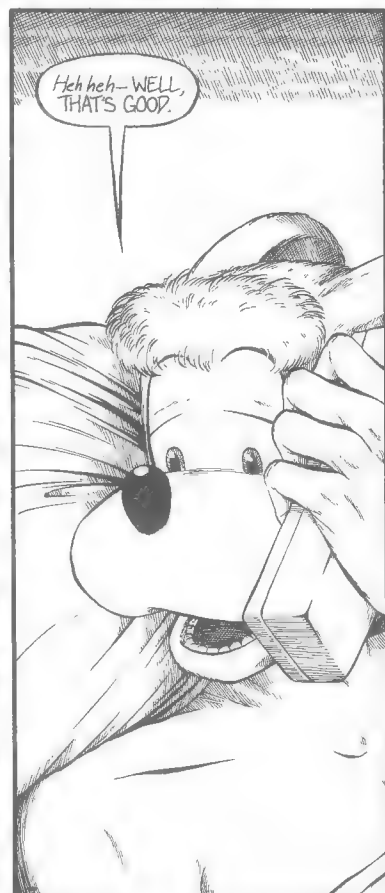
NO, WHAT
DO THEY
SAY?

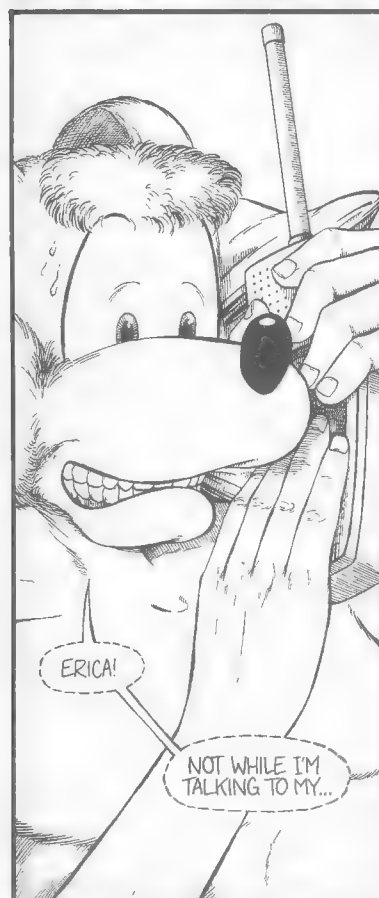
"COLD
HANDS"

"WARM
HEART"

"...FROZEN PECKER,
NO SWEETHEART"







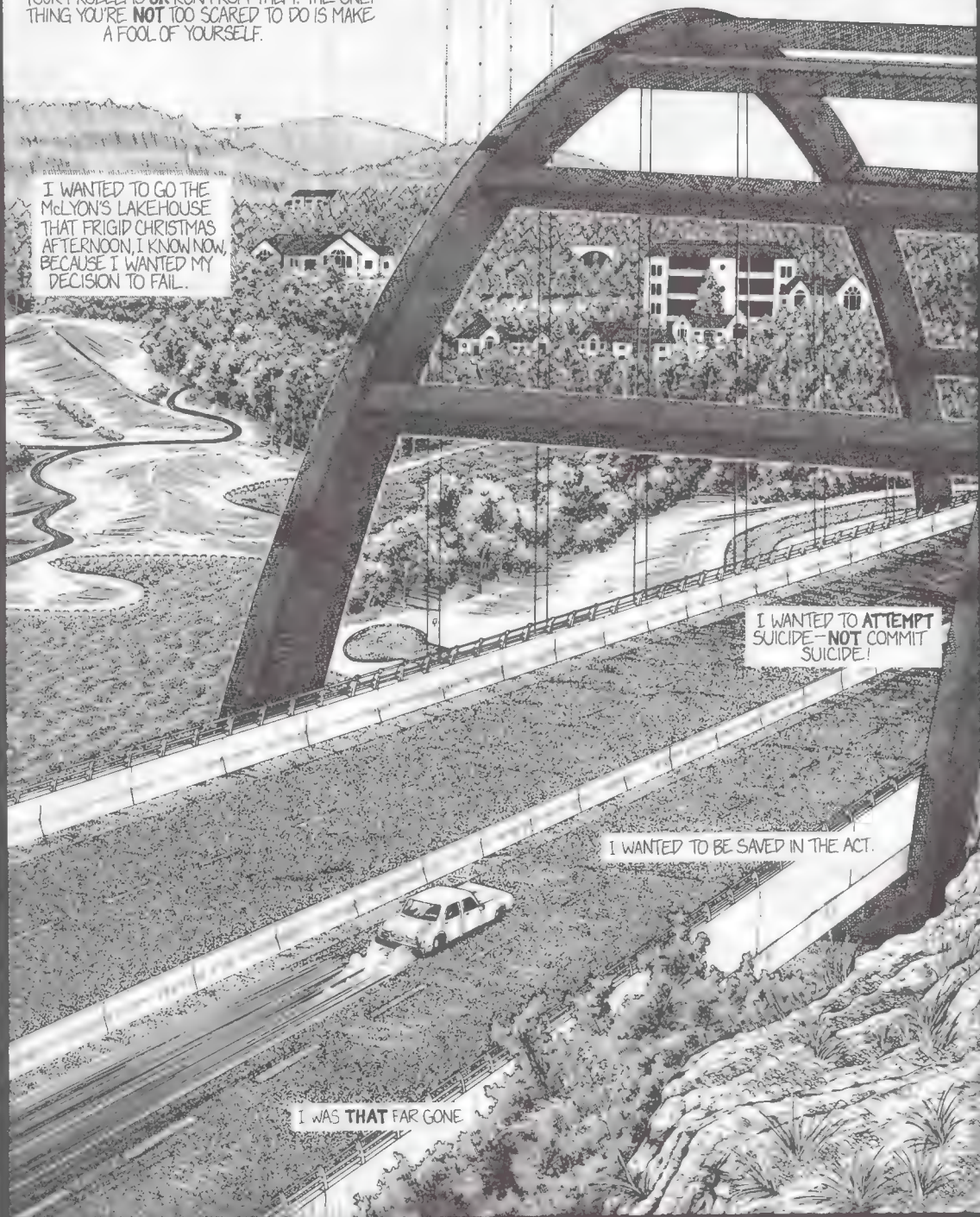
I GUESS IT TAKES A PRETTY SCREWED-UP
PERSON TO BE TOO SCARED TO FACE UP TO
YOUR PROBLEMS OR RUN FROM THEM. THE ONLY
THING YOU'RE **NOT** TOO SCARED TO DO IS MAKE
A FOOL OF YOURSELF.

I WANTED TO GO THE
McLYON'S LAKEHOUSE
THAT FRIGID CHRISTMAS
AFTERNOON, I KNOW NOW
BECAUSE I WANTED MY
DECISION TO FAIL.

I WANTED TO **ATTEMPT**
SUICIDE—**NOT** COMMIT
SUICIDE!

I WANTED TO BE SAVED IN THE ACT.

I WAS **THAT** FAR GONE





LOOK AT THIS!

I WAS PRETTY SURPRISED
WHEN I GOT YOUR CALL. I
THOUGHT YOU WERE SPENDING
CHRISTMAS TOGETHER!

AH, THIS IS JUST
AN AFTERNOON
VISIT.

HI, ARNIE!
HI, ERICA!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!



MERRY CHRISTMAS
TO YOU... AND HAPPY
SLIGHTLY LATE HAN-
NUKAH.

OH, YOU
GUYS, THAT'S
SWEET!

THIS IS
FROM US!

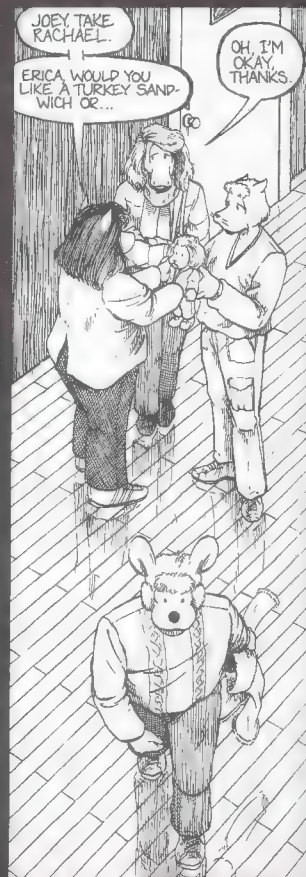


COME ON IN! —
I HOPE Y'ALL BROUGHT
APPETITES!

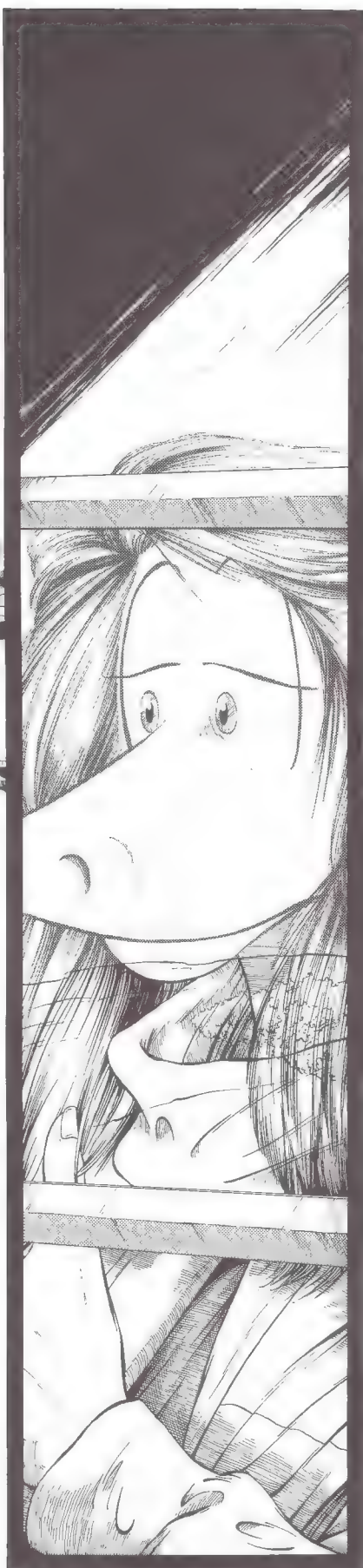
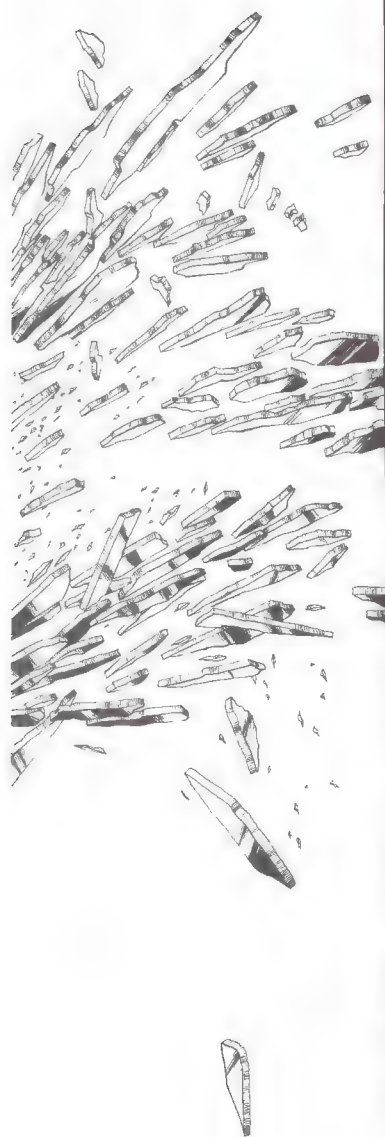
WE HAVE A
LOT OF LUNCH
LEFTOVERS!



KA-
BANGA
PANK
!







I MUST HAVE STARED AT THAT
LAKE FOR THIRTY MINUTES....

WHEN THE TIME FINALLY CAME
TO "DO IT" -- CAPITAL P. CAPITAL
I -- THE WHOLE THING WAS ODDLY
-- I DON'T KNOW --

UNEMOTIONAL?

I FELT DISTANT --ALOOF--

YOU KNOW--
"NOTHING MATTERS."

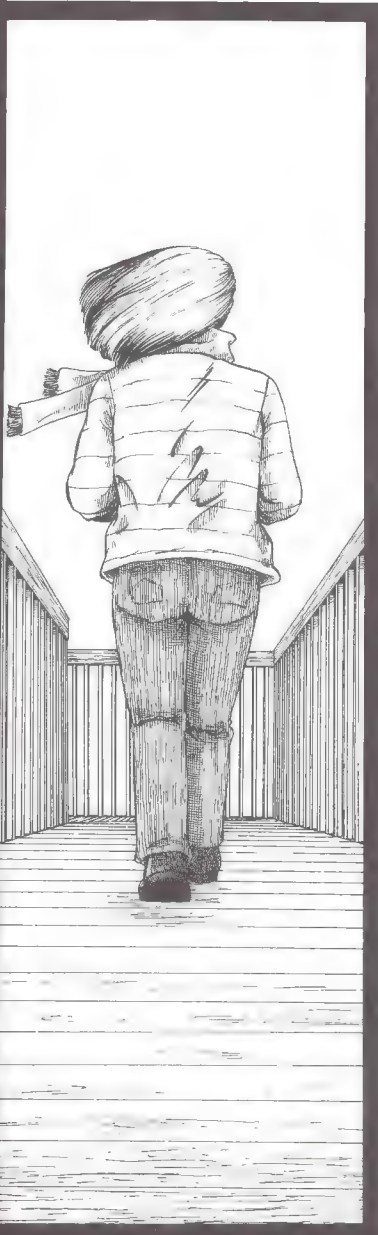
I SIMPLY WALKED OUT THE
BACK DOOR WITHOUT A WORD,
DOWN THE STEPS AND OUT TO
THE McLYONS' BOAT
DOCK

NO TEARS. NO BACKWARD
GLANCE.

NOTHING.



I WONDER IF THAT'S
HOW THEY DO IT ON
DEATH ROW?



SHIT, THIS IS GETTING MORBID.

ACTUALLY, I THOUGHT OF TWO THINGS AS I SAT ON THAT HARD WOODEN RAILING, TOOK OFF MY COAT AND BEGAN UNLACING MY BOOTS. (REMEMBER—THIS IS 20/20 HIND-SIGHT TALKING. AT THE TIME I WAS ABOUT 40% CONVINCED I WAS CHECKING OUT.)

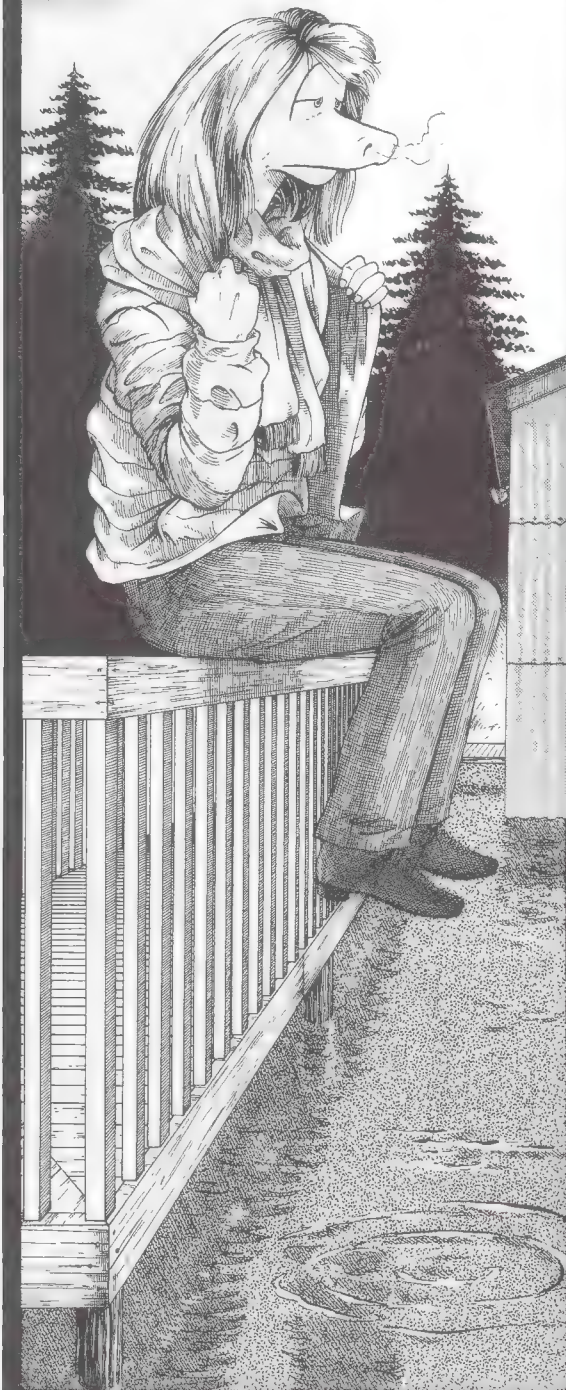
I THOUGHT OF ANNEKE—HOW I RAN OFF, LEAVING HER BEHIND, LEAVING HER TO PICK UP HER OWN PIECES. AND I BASKED IN SELF-PITY, WHICH IS, I SUPPOSE, GOOD TO DO IF YOU'RE PLANNING TO OFF YOURSELF.

I THOUGHT OF ARNIE.

I THOUGHT OF ARNIE, AND THE NIGHT BEFORE—OUR LAST NIGHT TOGETHER.

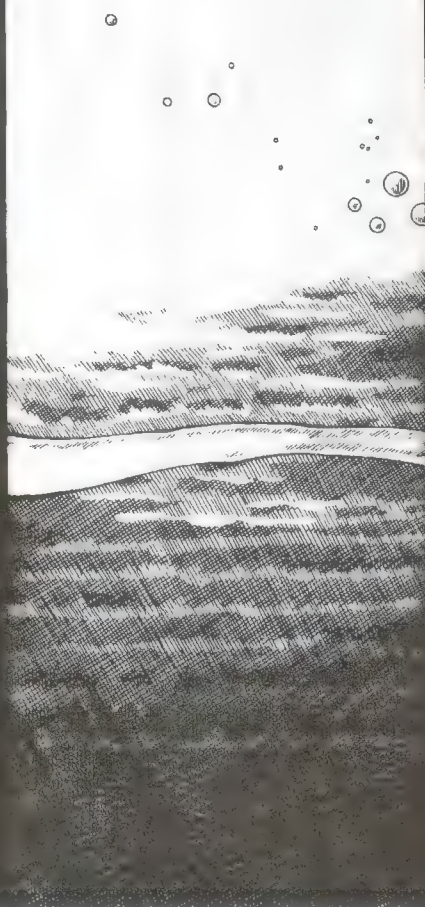
SOMETHING SCREAMED "STOP" FROM...SOMEPLACE. I COULD STAY HAPPY. I COULD KEEP THE ACT GOING, BE ERICA, MARRY ARNIE, DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY.

I THOUGHT OF ARNIE AS I TIED MY ANKLES.



I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TRANSPIRED
INSIDE THE HOUSE AT THE MOMENT
I JUMPED

MY MIND CONJURES A
SCENARIO OR TWO

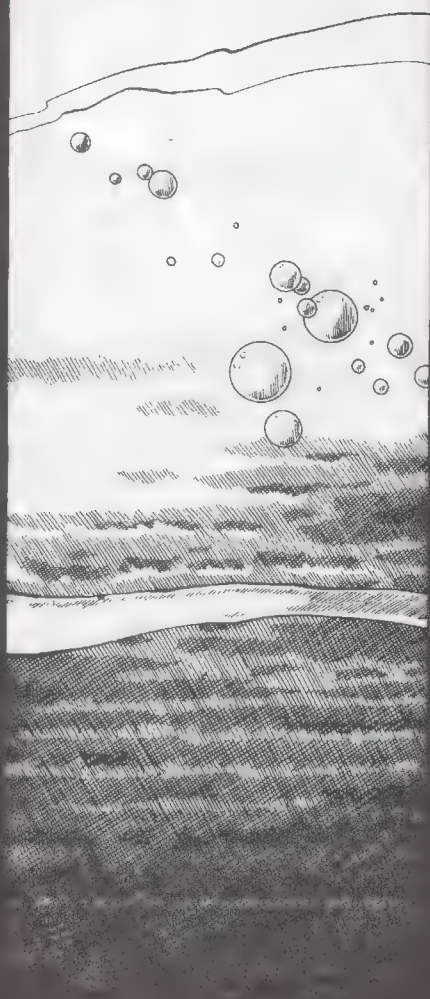


TERENCE'S MOTHER HAD
NOTICED THE BECOME
SHEET WAS QUARTY AGAIN

HE WONDERED IF HE SHOULD
MENTION ANYTHING HEY BOTH
OF JOEY'S PARENTS HAVE DONE
SOCIAL WORK—MRS. McLYON IS
A TOP-DOLLAR DIVORCE
COUNSELOR, FOR GOD'S SAKE


HE STARES DOWN AT ME
FROM THE HOUSE... THERE'S
EVEN SURPRISE AND WORRY
ON HIS FACE

AND HE SEES HE
FALLS IT



TERENCE'S MOTHER SAYS
ONE THING... ASKS HIM A
QUESTION. HE TURNS FROM
THE WINDOW BRIEFLY

AND WHEN HE TURNS BACK—



I WAS IN THE WATER FOR
LESS THAN A MINUTE...

IT'S AMAZING HOW
MUCH CAN HAPPEN IN
LESS THAN A MINUTE

THE COLD SHOCKED MY
BODY SO SEVERELY THAT I
WAS TOLD IF MRS. McLYON
HADN'T WRAPPED ME IN
HOT TOWELS RIGHT AWAY,
I WOULD HAVE GONE INTO
HYPOTHERMIA.

AS I MENTIONED BEFORE, THIS WAS ONLY A
HALF-ASSED ATTEMPT AT KILLING MYSELF...

SO WHEN I WENT UNDER,
I INSTINCTIVELY HELD MY
BREATH...

BUT MY FEET WERE TIED...

SO WHEN I TRIED TO KICK
MY LEGS I COULDN'T...

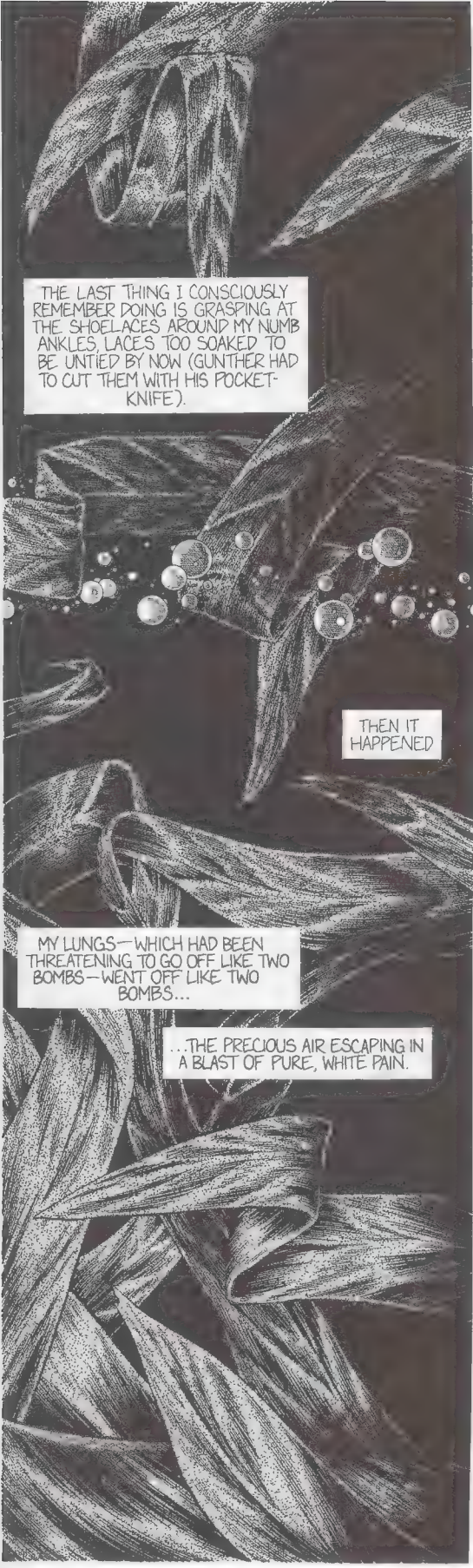
THEN I REALIZED I COULDN'T **FEEL** MY FEET,
PROBABLY BECAUSE I'D TIED THEM TOO TIGHT.

SO BEFORE I'D BEEN UNDER TEN SECONDS,
I BEGAN TO PANIC...

ANOTHER FIVE SECONDS...

I RECOGNIZED THE FEELING.
I'D FELT IT FIVE YEARS BEFORE...

I KNEW I WAS GOING TO DIE.



THE LAST THING I CONSCIOUSLY
REMEMBER DOING IS GRASPING AT
THE SHOELACES AROUND MY NUMB
ANKLES, LACES TOO SOAKED TO
BE UNTIED BY NOW (GUNTHER HAD
TO CUT THEM WITH HIS POCKET-
KNIFE).

THEN IT
HAPPENED

MY LUNGS—WHICH HAD BEEN
THREATENING TO GO OFF LIKE TWO
BOMBS—WENT OFF LIKE TWO
BOMBS...

...THE PRECIOUS AIR ESCAPING IN
A BLAST OF PURE, WHITE PAIN.

AND THAT WAS THE
END OF ERICA.

IT WAS KATHRYN THEY PULLED
OUT OF THAT FROZEN MURK... KATHRYN
WHO HACKED UP A HALF-PINT OF WATER
ON THE McLYON'S DOCK...

KATHRYN WHO WAS
FLOWN BY HELICOPTER
TO THE HOSPITAL
WITH A WARM I.V. IN
HER ARM...

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO RIDE
IN A HELICOPTER...

LOOKING BACK ON
THIS, I THINK TO MY-
SELF "THERE MUST
HAVE BEEN A MILLION
MORE SENSIBLE
THINGS I COULD'VE
DONE."

AND IT'S TRUE

BUT IT'S ALSO
TRUE THAT IN
SITUATIONS
LIKE THIS
SENSE GOES
OUT THE
WINDOW.

REMINDS ME OF
SOMETHING MY
FRIEND ADRIAN IN
NEW ORLEANS
ONCE SAID...

...ABOUT BEING
SNOWBLIND...

...HE'D HAVE TO
EXPLAIN...

ANYWAY, THE
MIDDLE OF MY
STORY IS NOW
COMPLETE.

NOW IT'S TIME
TO GO BACK TO
THE BEGINNING...

I DON'T WANT TO...

BUT A STORY'S GOT
TO HAVE A BEGINNING.

EVEN IF IT'S THE
HARDEST PART.

HERE WE GO...

HEP CATS

P.O. BOX 27157
AUSTIN, TX 78755-2157
hepcats@eden.com

Hey, kids. Just a quick note for those of you who have been wondering, "Which Way of the World?" Essentially, I have been concentrating on producing the new issues (13, 14, so on...) and the added pressures of getting these reprints out twice a month has led me to the inescapable conclusion that hacking up the *WotW* prologue into four-page chunks is not exactly making this very important (to me) new story turn out the way I want. Plus, these little installments aren't exactly providing readers or old readers sufficient incentive to pick up the reprints in great quantity. Orders so far have been light, and the word I keep getting is, "Yeah, we're all waiting for the new issues." So, I'm just going to set *WotW* aside for its own edition (August) and get it done to my satisfaction. I have already had to compromise it more than I'd like for the few backups that have appeared, and since I've never in the past had to compromise my work for space or time constraints this is not a new habit (really want to get into now. So, stay tuned to your local comic shop shelves this August for the *Way of the World* Prologue Special Issue, hitting the racks the month after the long-awaited *unlucky #13*. Yes, things are actually moving ahead in *Hepcats* land. After all these years I'm sure the fans who are actually followers of the work rather than clock-watchers know the drill: "Wagner'll get it done, sooner or later."

Mainly I wanted to bring this up because the first letter this issue deals with *Way of the World*, and gives me the very satisfying assurance that the few pages of the new story that have appeared are already touching a chord with fans. A creator can't ask for more than that!

"Are You Happy?"

Dear Martin:

This question was asked to me about 2 weeks ago and it has finally made me write you. I realize that these two events seem to have no connection, I hope I can explain.

First, some quick background. You don't know me, though I have written you on occasion via e-mail. I am a fan of your work and a supporter of your book. I attended UT during your *Hepcats* run in *The Daily Texan* and it is in fact one of my most pleasant memories about

UT (especially since Chris Ware was also on staff at the time). I graduated in 1990 with a B.S. in Pharmacy and am currently a pharmacy manager for HEB.

We have met once, at SOI (what year was that?). [February 19, 1995.—MW] I inquired about when *Hepcats* #13 would come out and chatted briefly about the Heppak (the latter I eventually purchased—the strip I have is of the aerobicize ad found at HEB). It is also something I cherish greatly. You struck me as very down-to-earth and level headed. Maybe that's why I'm writing you....

Like I said, "One of my friends asked me point-blank "Are you happy?" I don't even recall the conversation that led up to the question. I looked at my friend very hard—I'm not really sure why. I think I was almost offended ("How dare you ask me?"), probably because I never even asked myself that question before. I have never given myself the chance.

I am a "white-collar" worker. I have a salaried job with little manual labor. I make a good deal of money—though most I spend on bills and "extracurricular activities" (more on that in a moment). I currently live at home and have an assortment of women wanting to go out with me. All this and someone dares ask me "Are you happy?"

My life has not been the same since.

The answer, obviously, is "No." For the past 4 years I have been a pharmacy major for a large corporation. In those 4 years, my health has taken a beating, my spending has become out of control (hence the bills and living at home), my social life is a shambles, I have nearly no free time, and I drink far too much. Of course, it's infinitely easier to ignore all this and continue on my merry way as I have done till now. However, I am now forced to look into the mirror and see someone I don't particularly like.

Like all lives, there are twists, turns, and dead ends. Far more than can be explained in a

simple letter. The short version is something like this:

When I first became a pharmacist (not yet a manager) in 1991, I treated myself to going to a gentleman's club (sound familiar?). In my case, it was (and is) Giorgio's. I was getting over a nasty break-up over the previous winter. For the first 3 years I was a sporadic but regular customer. I would—be "entertained"—by the dancers on occasion and would perhaps have the occasional drink. (I usually just drink club soda and lime.) Once I became manager (hold on to your hats)....

I started going 2-3 times a week, spent between \$100-\$200 at a time. Started drinking heavier and heavier. Had a couple of solo car accidents (never one that got the police to notice—thank God). Got involved with a dancer for two years who managed to abuse my love and my credit rating. Got involved with a woman who was married with a child. Had my closest friend at work fired when I found out she was stealing and reselling narcotics. Had another good coworker die of lymphatic cancer at 22. (I was a pallbearer for that.) In a sense, I haven't just been to the edge, I have been to the edge and stuck one foot out. I am still there, only now I am putting my foot back down and stepping away.

I miss having a life. A life that I like. I realize now that life will never really make sense, but I'm looking for a sense (or illusion) of order.

You know—I'm not looking back at what I've written because it probably doesn't make sense. I'm sorry if it doesn't.

Maybe I do know why I'm writing to you. *Way of the World*. In it Joey is about 33 in 1999. I'll be 33 in 2000. In it Joey decides that some changes need to be made. I do too. We both identified with Joey since the Texan strips.

Back to *Way*. I think the biggest problem with the world and humans in general is that everyday life has become too fast! No one has any patience left in this world—I

don't think I do anymore. People want their problems and needs addressed yesterday. No one writes—everyone types or dictates. Our brains probably move ten—maybe a hundred—times faster than our grandfathers' but the stuff our brains move is garbage—statistics, trivia, babble, a commercial jingle, etc. I know I'm not unaffected either. Back in school I used to write poetry in my classes. Now, just writing this handwritten letter is nervewracking to me (and a bitch to read, I'm sure). I guess my point is, like Joey, I want to SLOW DOWN. Not just to "smell the flowers" but to just see the damn things. We all live in a growingly chaotic world—hell, civilization may even be on its downward slide—I just want to enjoy what's left of it.

I'm spent for today. It's 2:06 AM and I have to go to work tomorrow. I really don't expect an answer or a reply (though of course, one is always appreciated). I would with permission like to continue to write to you. If you'd rather I not—that's cool—just let me know. I continue to support what you're doing and I wish you—as always—the best of luck with Hepcats and in your life. God bless.

Your friend,

ROBERT REYES

SAN ANTONIO, TX

Well. You make a solid point about life being too fast, but what we always seem to forget is that we have a choice in the matter, and yet we rarely take that choice because of the pressures and expectations that are brought to bear upon us, as well as the myriad forms of programming our brains receive as we battle our way through life. (If nothing else, I can certainly relate to your comment that people have no patience. People in the comics industry today are so obsessed with whether or not a comic is "on time" or "late" that the question of whether or not it is any damn good has become entirely irrelevant. Ours is an art-based industry for which art is a nuisance.)

In Way of the World, Joey—like you, like me—wants something new, wants to be far from the proverbial rat race and have the time just to be himself, just to determine whether or not he really even likes himself. He isn't sure what form his odyssey will take—only that he knows he's got to take one or slowly

"die" as he is so thoroughly absorbed the pressures of life there is no more him left.

It was a very deliberate choice of mine to place Joey in a career situation that is more or less the polar opposite of my own. Joey is a minor corporate executive with a good salary, insurance, a 401K plan, security—he embodies those attributes our society labels as those of a "successful" man. I work in the comics industry: enough said. If I weren't moonlighting on animation projects and the odd freelance job, I would not earn enough money to keep a roof over my head. This business is worse than lame, scuttling itself as it did with the get-rich-quick greedmongering of speculation—and if you want my unfettered opinion it neither deserves me nor the hundreds of other highly talented artists it keeps hanging by a thread. (The fans are deserving, the industry is not.) Joey has the things I don't right now; but he's unhappy with his lot too. Odd, isn't it?

I made this story choice after being told by numerous professional friends of mine how they envied me. I couldn't imagine any possible reason why they would say such a thing. I have lived from check to check many times. They have homes, new cars, mutual funds, things that are just words to me. "But," they tell me, "you followed your dream!" And they go on to explain how they'd do it all over again if they had a chance to be 23 for one day. They'd record that damn CD or write that novel or do whatever the hell it was that they now have to relegate to the realm of eternal hobby, because there's just no time.

Suddenly my situation doesn't look so bad. Hell, I'm not that poor. I do make extra income on the side. I have a nice townhome; I'm a renter but what the fuck. I have creature comforts; books, music, laserdiscs, Nintendo 64. I wake up when I want, work when the muse flows and don't when it doesn't, and generally have time to enjoy being Martin Wagner. I have a profoundly special person in my life who provides a nonstop source of inspiration, love, and moral support.

Like Joey, I want more, such as the chance to move into other fields, make more money, gain wider exposure for me and my work and opportunities to do other things beyond comics—but I don't want these

things from a perspective of hopelessness. I used to. Some years ago I was in a major funk. It was, in fact, at this time that I conceived of the Way of the World novel, and in its earliest written drafts, it began as a bleak and sad work indeed. But as it has come time to actually produce it, it has taken on a much lighter tone and is now, I realize, the story I want to tell. It all boils down to perspective, and mine simply changed out of necessity. Being bummed out all the time gets fucking old.

Because you won't get anywhere in life coming from a position of unhappiness. Even if you are unhappy, simply acknowledge it and reframe the scenario in your mind to where you're just not unhappy anymore. Example: "Okay, I'm in a life situation right now that is not fulfilling to me. What must I do to change it?" Then work up your game plan. For me, it was to find other things to do outside of Hepcats, without taking away from Hepcats (like my current top-secret project Darshan), to remind myself—as Joey says—that there is a big wide world out there waiting to be discovered and conquered. One of the most distasteful things about living in our society today is that everyone seems to have an "either/or" set of rules in their head that serve only to limit themselves and their experience of life: I call it the poverty mentality. "Either I'm financially successful, or I have integrity." "Either she's pretty, or she's intelligent." "Either this comic comes out on time, or I won't order it." (Sorry, couldn't resist.) All that the poverty mentality does is stick you in that infamous rut from which no one can seem to find an escape.

But...if you believe in abundance, if you believe that there's always more, that you have the ability to make more...guess what happens. It becomes very difficult to control you with the promise of a favor or a handout. Suddenly, you're in charge, and you don't want anyone's handout. You want the hand away from you...because it's in your way.

Oh well, can't really take up any more room with this, but it is an interesting discussion. Sure, write me often; let's continue this, and whoever else wants to chime in is certainly encouraged to do so. Just remember that happiness or unhappiness is a state of mind, and it's a state of your mind, which means no one has any business controlling it but

you. I'm not saying that everyone should pull a Joey and quit their jobs to lead Quixotic existences; your measure of happiness is up to you. You just have to dare to let yourself do it.

Today is a good day. Not only did I buy *Hepcats* #7 a couple of weeks ago, but I bought *Hepcats* #8 today and an original copy of #9 as well. I paid five bucks for it (just because I know the people at my comic shop well) and as it turns out, you signed the interior. I guess I kind of ripped them off. (But if I knew at the time, I would have told them.) This isn't the same #9 that's also hung up on their wall that they're selling for 20 dollars, which I had been planning to buy for the past year or so, but it'll definately do.

I am now going on a search for every other damned issue from the first printing. Thank God I know where to look...I'm sure I can find half of them easily. You can believe that I'm excited about #11 coming out so soon, too. I am still determined to order 5 copies and then send four of them out to various friends. Thanks for a great series, Martin. If I had to drop every title but one, *Hepcats* would be the only comic on my reading list. That's quite an accomplishment. I'm trying to think of a way to convince you to get AOL right now, but I can't think of an effective way to push it. I suggest you try it sometime though...it's pretty damned awesome. Talk to you later,

KURT EVANS

AOL, huh? No thanks. Don't need to pay out the wazoo for Internet service. However, I'm glad you're such a big fan and I wish you good luck in finding all those first printings. I don't even think I have all the back issues in first printings! (Well, maybe I do...)

Martin,

Just wanted to thank you for the mention in *Comics Journal* #201. You're a brave man taking on Gary Groth in his own magazine—he always has the last word, doesn't he? But your letter made several very important points in an accessible way, and Gary's hypocritical response failed to dent your arguments. On behalf of self-publishers everywhere, thanks for continuing to support us.

Now if I had as much bottle as you, I'd write to the *Journal* . . . but, nah, haven't really got the time.

All the very best,

GARY SPENCER MILLIDGE

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I suggest anyone who hasn't picked up Strangehaven yet do so at once; contact Gary if you cannot get copies at your local shop. I think a trade paperback is due soon. Some of the early issues look a bit stiff (too much photo ref) but he settled quickly and nicely into one of the more unique and intriguing comic tales I've seen since I got in the business.

As for that other Gary, sheesh. You know, I've always gotten along with Gary personally despite any disagreements we have had, but his recent tendency to inject personal snide insults into his rebuttals isn't terribly respectful and really makes him look bad and even desperate, particularly when they are untrue. (I've never posed for a photo with Mr. T, and cannot for the life of me imagine why I would want to.) Still, you have to be impressed by Gary's deluded notions of his own moral, intellectual, and ethical unassailability. In the same editorial I criticized in my letter, Gary lambasts independent comics publishers—presumably all of them—for being sleazeballs who would “sell out in a minute if they had something to sell.” It cracks me up that Gary honestly seems to think no one will read that and think, “Hmm...Eros Comix...Eros Comix...” Anyway, I stand by my letter, but you know that. Let's hope its publication helps to shake the *Journal* out of its self-congratulatory “we actually made it to 200!” torpor.

Dear Mr. Wagner,

Hmm. I never know how to start writing to people whose work I enjoy, so I think I'm just gonna ask some questions...

1) Recently, on the “official” *Hepcats* web page there was a poll to determine whether or not readers would buy an Erica figure. I've seen a bunch of the online responses to the poll, but I've never heard any

word from the people in charge (i.e. you and Antarctic Press) as to whether or not a figure will ever be produced. So, my question is: Will there be an Erica figure of any sort any time soon?

2) What is the status on *Snowblind Part Two*? I think I should rephrase that. I'm aware that the story is being served up in single issues for the time being (and I'm reading, trust me), and I know that there is a planned *Snowblind Part Two* collection. I guess what I'm trying to ask is: Is there a release date set for a hardcover version of *Snowblind 2*?

I think that covers it. Fanboy stuff I was trying to avoid and just can't: Think *Hepcats* is one of the best books available right now; enjoy it immensely; looking forward to *Radio Hepcats Two*. Think you're a talented artist/writer and a nice guy to boot. (Don't worry, not obsessive, but I met you at one of the San Diego Cons and was impressed by how you treated your fans, unlike some artist who treated the fans like so many annoyances.) Anyway, thank you for taking the time to read this and I apologize for its rambling nature.

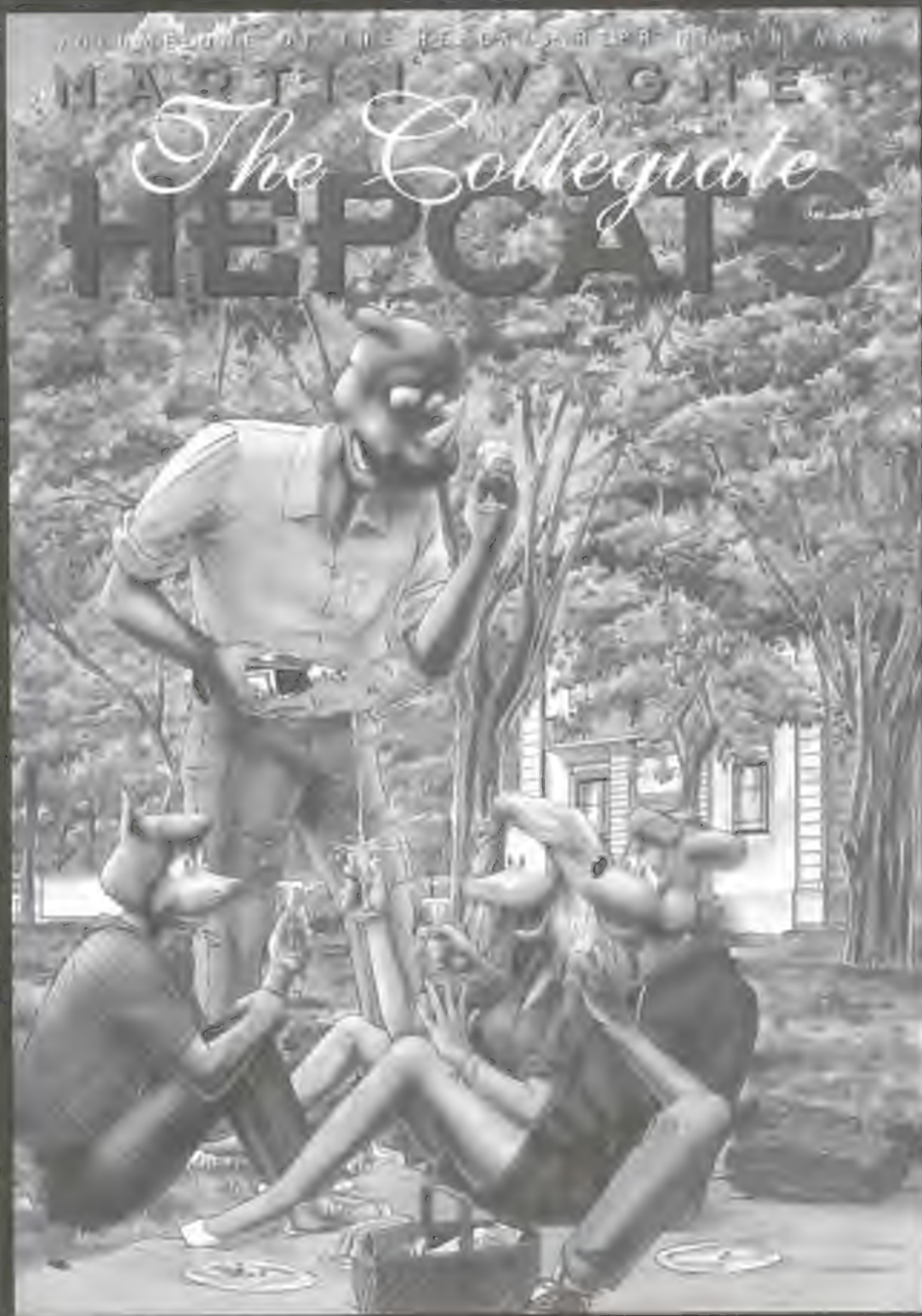
Sincerely,

JOEL NEFF

I hope your first question was answered by the drawings that appeared in #9, Joel. I'd very much like to have an Erica figure out as a Christmas item, but that's all going to depend upon the state of the industry, AP's ability to produce it, and a host of other factors that are at this stage entirely unpredictable. Times are tough, to put it as trivially as possible.

There is no definite date for the *Snowblind Part Two* collected edition, although of course in a perfect world, it would have been out a year or so ago. The holdup of the completion of *Snowblind* has been an annoyance for me as well as *Hepfans* worldwide, as we all know. But I am at least happy it's finally underway and folks can get back into the *Hepcats* groove full-throttle starting this summer. My plan is to release the graphic novel edition in the same way I released the last one: a simultaneous printing of the first trade-paperback edition and a 500-copy limited edition hardcover run. Let's shoot for the turn of the century....?

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Antarctic Blast

April 1998

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ANTARCTIC PRESS ATTRACTIONS

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

April 1998 ATTRACTIONS

Luftwaffe Pilot:

12 inch Action Figure
Onigami #1

Luftwaffe: 1946 TPB #1
(2nd Printing)

Luftwaffe: 1946 T-Shirt
Heccats #9 & #10

Luftwaffe: 1946 Annual
Robotech Annual #1

Luftwaffe: 1946 #9

Warrior Nun:

Black and White #9

Rheintochter #2

Luftwaffe: 1946

Color Special

Ninja High School #62

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Martin's Highest Level on

007 Goldeneye

Cradle on Secret Agent (I

can't catch Trevelyan!)

I hope I don't get caught fooling around!

by Joeming W. Dunn, MD

I can't believe how much is going on at Antarctic Press and in the comic industry in general this month. I haven't been this excited since...since...I finally won a game of LASER QUEST!

1) James Cameron, director of many fine movies, is FINALLY doing the *SPIDER-MAN* movie. This is what we need to create excitement in the mainstream. Just think, this year's Director of the Year doing a superhero movie. That's like Monet painting a *SUPERMAN* cover.

2) Image and Marvel are merging into one company. This has been in the works since Marvel's bankruptcy announcement. I can't wait to see Todd MacFarlane doing Marvel comics again. It hasn't been the same since the original Image creators left.

3) Alex Robinson's *Box Office Poison* wins three Eisner awards. What is an Eisner award? Well, supposedly, it's like the Academy Awards of comics. If you are one of the readers of *Box Office Poison*, you can see why it deserves an Eisner.

4) Fred Perry leaves Antarctic Press. After many years of being published by Antarctic Press, Fred decides to take a sabbatical. "After drawing over 40 issues of *Gold-Digger*, I have received all the praise and accolades that I could possibly imagine. I mean, what I have done has never been duplicated in comics, and so I want to leave on top!" quotes Fred.

5) Our sister company, Radio Comix, grows by leaps and bounds and celebrates an anniversary. "I knew when we spun off a separate company

specifically devoted to anthropomorphics it would be successful," states editor Elin Winkler. "We have gotten a lot of requests to separate from AP, but we like the relationship as it is."

6) Publisher Ben Dunn to draw *MIGHTY TINY* full-time. "This is the series everybody wants to see, so I decided to drop everything and devote all my energy to *Mighty Tiny*," states creator Ben Dunn. "I don't know if we will publish under the AP or Radio Comix banner, but we have time for that decision."

7) Antarctic Toys to produce *HITLER* action figure. "When we placed our survey out on what figure they would like to see, Hitler was the number one choice," states Joeming W. Dunn, Vice President at Antarctic Press. "Our surveys were in all our *Luftwaffe: 1946* books, so we felt that it was accurate. In fact, creator of *Luftwaffe* Ted Nomura compiled the survey himself." Choices included were a Smurf, John Quincy Adams, the 5th Emperor of China, Idi Amin or Hitler.

8) The following series are scheduled for release later this year: *ESPolice* by Pat Duke, *Diesel* by Jochen Weltjens, and completion of the original *Shotgun Mary* miniseries by Joe Wight.

9) Antarctic Press announces to attend more conventions. "I've driven to enough conventions to circle the globe twice," states Sales and Promotions manager Matt High. "Why not try to drive the distance to the Moon?"

10) Finally, I hope you don't believe everything you read...and if you do, please write for information on purchasing oil rights here at our office.

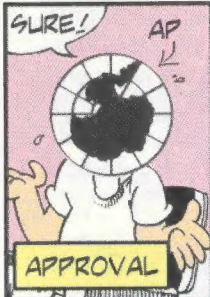
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I'D LIKE TO DO
AN USAGI FIGURE!

CONCEPT

STAN



DESIGN

PROTOTYPE

USAGI YOJIMBO



ACTION FIGURE

YES, IT IS FINALLY HERE!
THE OFFICIAL, DESIGNED BY
CREATOR STAN SAKAI HIMSELF
USAGI YOJIMBO AND SPOT
FIGURE SET!

NO CONSTIPATED GRIMACE...
NO "YOJIMBO AKIMBO..."
JUST THE MAJESTY AND
GLORY OF THE ORIGINAL
SAMURAI RABBIT!

